

Nevada Strategic Planning Session for Statewide Communications Interoperability



**Las Vegas, Nevada
September 14, 2005
Session Report**

I. Executive Summary

The Nevada Strategic Planning Session for Statewide Communications Interoperability on September 14, 2005 provided valuable input to the development of practitioner-driven recommendations to the Nevada Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan. The session resulted in the following: (1) shared agreement on statewide interoperability in the current and future states, the case for changing and the barriers to improving voice and data communications across all levels of emergency response; and (2) identification of the top four strategic initiatives critical to improving the efficiency and increasing the capacity of statewide public safety communications and interoperability.

The top four key initiatives identified by practitioners included:

➤ **Governance Initiative:**

Establish a governance structure to allow a single point of contact for all interoperability activities

➤ **Capabilities Assessment Initiative:**

Conduct a capabilities assessment and gap analysis using the results to:

- a. Maximize existing capabilities pending the development of improved communications interoperability;
- b. Increase training and awareness of first responders in how to most effectively operationalize current equipment and systems

➤ **Funding Initiative:**

Secure consistent funding for ongoing development, capital replacement, and maintenance costs and identify partnerships in which resources will be provided

➤ **Education Initiative:**

Increase education of the public, elected officials, and policy makers on the requirements and priorities for public safety communications so they have realistic expectations and provide appropriate levels of support

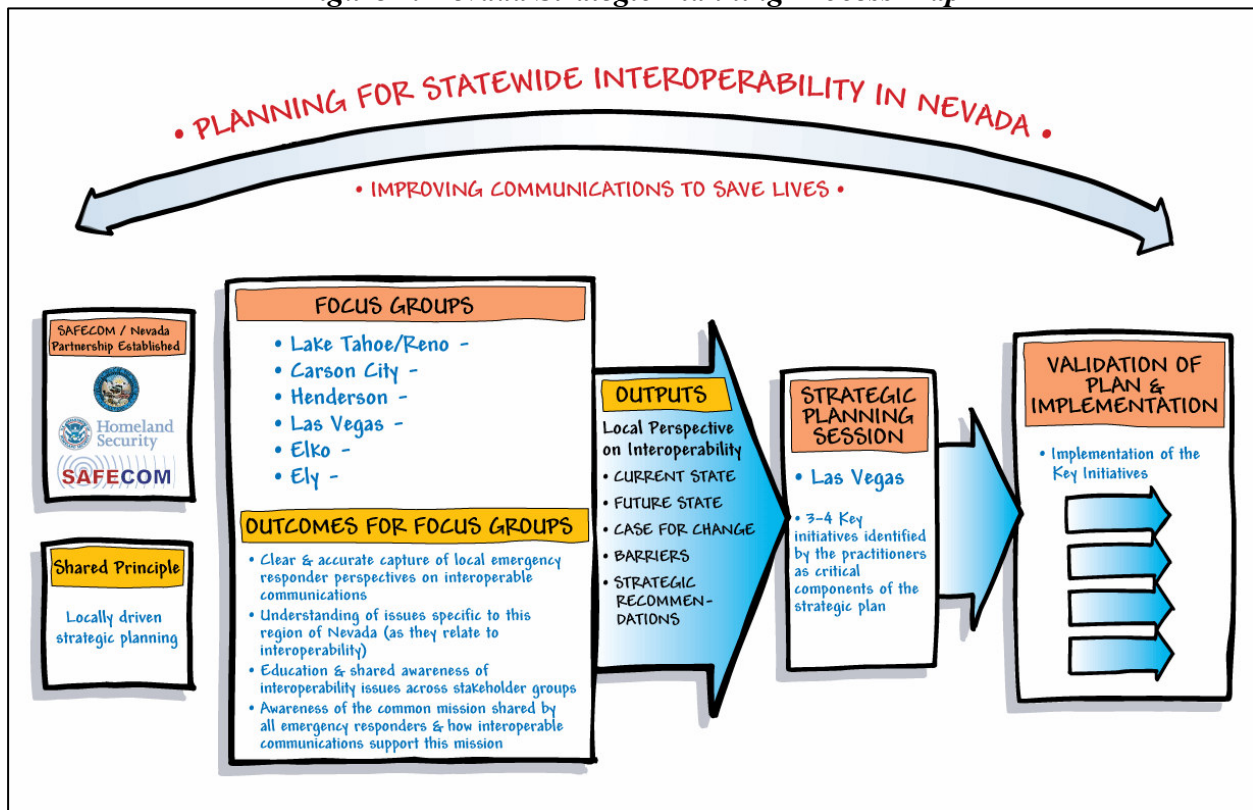
II. Introduction

The State of Nevada has established a partnership with the SAFECOM Program (a program of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Interoperability and Compatibility) to conduct a pilot project that will lead to the development of practitioner-driven recommendations to the state's communications interoperability plan. SAFECOM's mission is to serve as the umbrella program within the federal government to help local, state, tribal and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a statewide interoperability strategic plan. The Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) serves as the primary point of contact for these efforts.

In order to develop a practitioner-driven statewide communications interoperability strategic plan, the State asked SAFECOM to conduct six (6) regional focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and emergency medical services (EMS) departments. Public health, local and state agencies also participated in order to accurately reflect local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Nevada. In addition to the six focus group sessions, SAFECOM conducted a Strategic Planning Session to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups.

The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM brought a locally driven philosophy and strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and the Strategic Planning Session.

Figure 1. Nevada Strategic Planning Process Map



Each focus group session was designed as a series of conversations centered on the following aspects of communications interoperability (statewide and regional): the current state, the envisioned future state, case for why change needs to happen, barriers to achieving the future state, and recommended strategies to pursue.

The Nevada Strategic Planning Session for Statewide Communications Interoperability, held on September 14, 2005, brought together key stakeholders and leaders from the local, tribal, regional, state, and federal levels to identify key initiatives for public safety communications interoperability in Nevada, based on the local public safety responder perspectives gathered from six regional focus groups. The outcomes of the session included:

- ❑ Shared agreement on statewide interoperability in the current and future states, the case for changing and the barriers to improving voice and data communications across all levels of emergency response
- ❑ Identification of the top four strategic initiatives critical to improving the efficiency and increasing the capacity of statewide public safety communications and interoperability

III. Detailed Overview

Current State

The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts gathered at the regional focus groups about current interoperability capabilities and needs in Nevada regarding response efforts spanning day-to-day operations up through catastrophic events.

The SAFECOM team summarized the entire set of data collected for the Current State in the six regional focus group sessions by reviewing the data for common themes, recurring ideas, and repetition. In organizing the data for presentation at the Strategic Planning Session, six categories for communicating the data emerged. These included Governance, Operations and Procedures, Training and Awareness, Technology, Funding, and Coordination between the Federal and State Level. After reviewing this data, the Strategic Planning Session participants agreed that the following statements best describe the Current State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- The existing, centralized decision-making body must have sufficient authority to address current needs
- There is a lack of representation and/or participation of practitioners from across the state in committees, meetings, and policy making
- Leaders fear making wrong or uninformed decisions for solutions that will address all the needs of the local, regional, and state communities
- There is a lack of cooperation and communication and territorial egos hinder progress
- There is limited training and education for first responders and no unified approach for educating first responders about existing capabilities



- There is a lack of communication and awareness among many jurisdictions and agencies about how to call in incidents
- There is a lack of standardization, planning, and agreements for operating systems, procedures, training, frequency usage, and speaking a common language



- Vendors are influencing purchasing decisions
- When changing vendors, without open standards, changes must be made across the board often including expensive infrastructure changes
- One technology solution does not fit everybody
- Coordination across the federal, state, and local levels is in its infancy
- There is a lack of awareness and acknowledgement that the federal government has jurisdiction over land in Nevada and can support and must participate in interoperability efforts
- There is a lack of realistic funding for what is being asked of first responders

Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Nevada.

The SAFECOM team summarized the entire set of data collected for the Future State in the six regional focus group sessions by reviewing the data for common themes, recurring ideas, and repetition. In organizing the data for presentation at the Strategic Planning Session, six categories for communicating the data emerged. These included Governance, Operations and Procedures, Training and Awareness, Technology, Funding, and Coordination between the Federal and State Level. After reviewing this data, the Strategic Planning Session participants agreed that the following statements best describe the Future State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- Nevada maintains a decision-making executive level agency that reflects the needs, philosophies and practices of all stakeholders and is formalized, representative, comprehensive of stakeholder groups, responsible for a repository of knowledge base, funding and approval authority, and developing training standards
- Data and voice interoperability exist within Nevada, the federal government, and communities outside of Nevada
- Nevada enacts laws that provide for the funding, direction, and support of training and adequate staff
- Nevada manages non-competitive, reliable funding sources for interoperability with no unfunded mandates
- Practitioners can “press the big button” and talk to the person that they want to when they want with an effective process in place for continued communications should the communications system fail – “a backup big button”
- Nevada promotes information sharing, collaboration, and coordination, and all communities understand the impact of technology changes

- Technology and frequency compatibility exist across Nevada with redundant, networked interagency regional dispatch centers and infrastructure
- Nevada develops command and tactical operational policies and procedures that support the use of all technologies in place
- Nevada conducts frequent and unannounced multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional training exercises that simulate real-life scenarios, mock disasters, tabletop exercises, and reactions to system failures
- Nevada creates a centralized multi-agency lessons learned library with the responsibility and authority for no-notice exercises, training, and policy development
- Resources from other states can communicate on Nevada's systems
- Nevada improves communications by having collaboration and cooperation among all agencies organized around NIMS principles

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Nevada's state of interoperable communications do not occur. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals ranging from state and local officials, county commissioners, and the general public, and result in action.

After reviewing the data summary developed from information gathered during the six regional focus group sessions, the Strategic Planning Session participants supported the following Case for Change. These statements are the most compelling reasons for Nevada to abandon the current state and embrace their envisioned future:

- The public believes that emergency responders are capable of protecting them – right now, that expectation cannot be fulfilled in a devastating incident
- Nevada wants its citizens and visitors to know that emergency responders can protect and assist the public in any emergency event so to make the public's perception on how emergency responders *should* communicate a reality requires change
- Public perception of safety is important to the Nevada economy; tourists want to come to place where they feel safe
- Citizens do not care how practitioners talk to each other; they want to know that practitioners will respond
- An interoperable communications system is essential to protect life, limb, or property
- A cost benefit analysis does not trump public safety; however, improving interoperability will save money, infrastructure, and lives in the long run
- Interoperability is not a product that can simply be purchased and this needs to be explained to the public; successful interoperability improvement efforts will result in gradual change and benefits



- Changing our current systems or behaviors may not cost much more if practitioners all work together; the changes may even save money in the long run by avoiding cost duplication, increasing effectiveness, and gaining economies of scale
- Nevada is running out of time to address interoperability; the next event could be here

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

After reviewing the summary developed from the data gathered during the six regional focus group sessions, the Strategic Planning Session participants highlighted the following Barriers to achieving the desired future of communications interoperability in Nevada:



- There is an inability to change mindsets
- Turf battles continue to get in the way due to fear of losing sphere of influence
- There is a lack of clear and meaningful communications across the public safety community
- There is not a complete inventory of current capabilities and an incomplete picture of the capabilities needed to achieve the future state
- Prior investments were too expensive to make vast changes
- The public and elected officials lack awareness and education of interoperability
- If more constituents ask for something other than interoperability, those needs are met first
- There is a lack of commitment by those who control the funds and make the laws both at the local and state level
- Lobbying and politics are getting in the way
- The public is happy with the service they are receiving
- There is not a common understanding of the existing language surrounding interoperability
- It is unsafe to publicize our weaknesses to the general public
- There is no regional communications plan using existing infrastructure
- There are too many ways to approach solutions

Strategic Initiatives

The purpose of the Strategy conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state, including the completion of the statewide plan and identification of the most important initiatives the state can undertake in the short term.

In validating and providing upgrades to the key initiatives identified during the six regional focus group sessions, the Strategic Planning Session participants proposed the following four critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

- **Governance Initiative:**
Establish a governance structure to allow a single point of contact for all interoperability activities
- **Capabilities Assessment Initiative:**
Conduct a capabilities assessment and gap analysis using the results to:
 - a. Maximize existing capabilities pending the development of improved communications interoperability
 - b. Increase training and awareness of first responders in how to most effectively operationalize current equipment and systems
- **Funding Initiative:**
Secure consistent funding for ongoing development, capital replacement, and maintenance costs and identify partnerships in which resources will be provided
- **Education Initiative:**
Increase education of the public, elected officials, and policy makers on the requirements and priorities for public safety communications so they have realistic expectations and provide appropriate levels of support

The Strategic Planning Session participants recommended that the implementation of these initiatives stagger in the order above with the caveat that Funding and Education can begin simultaneously. The participants also advocated for key actions for each proposed initiative. The following table depicts the high-level implementation tasks for completion over the course of the next 12 months.

Initiatives	High-Level Implementation Tasks
Governance	Establish credibility for the Nevada Communications Steering Committee
	Determine who is and should be represented
	Set the parameters for future
	Establish support and buy-in from stakeholders
	Evaluate and submit, if necessary, legislation to authorize and regulate the governing body
Capabilities Assessment	Develop written process for interaction of Regional Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) with adjacent jurisdictions
	Define the assessment approach with clear objectives
	Develop an assessment tool to collect clear and usable data
	Complete the assessment
	Set the minimum requirements
	Develop an interoperability appendix for the state mutual aid plan
Funding	Identify all available funding sources
	Identify shareable resources
	Review acquisition plans
	Leverage data from the capabilities assessment to define funding priorities
Education	Develop a common base of information to use in educating stakeholders
	Craft a communications plan that targets key audiences and provides them with appropriate information
	Designate the governing body as the primary reference or authority for defining a common language around interoperability and definitions

IV. Next Steps

The key initiatives identified in the Strategic Planning Session, along with data gathered through the six (6) regional focus groups, will serve as the cornerstones of the recommendations SAFECOM will make regarding the Nevada Communication Interoperability Plan Version 1.0.

There is a strong commitment to maintain the communication flow between the NCSC and the participants of the Strategic Planning Session and each focus group, even as the planning phase for statewide interoperability in Nevada ends. This report details the conversations and results of the Strategic Planning Session for distribution to the participants by Wednesday, September 21, 2005. The NCSC website provides additional informational resources as well as the reports from each regional focus group session. The NCSC invites you to visit the website at <http://ncsc.nv.gov/> for regular updates on the progress of its work and to remain involved in the future revisions of the Nevada Communication Interoperability Plan. The NCSC values the voice of the practitioners and recognizes that involvement of the men and women on the ground are critical to successful communications interoperability planning efforts.

Appendix A

Participants in the September 14, 2005 Nevada Strategic Planning Session for Statewide Communications Interoperability:

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Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Nevada Strategic Planning Process

